

SATURDAY, DEC. 29 1906

## THE BLACK FLAG

A NEW YEAR'S STORY.

By Opie Read.

PHYSICIAN ordered Crandall to go south. "What for?" the young fellow asked, rather testily. "You forget that I was the successful center of the world."

"Yes, I know all about that," the doctor broke in. "And I also know that in your great strength—in the over development of your muscles, there lies a danger. Go south for the winter and rest. You can afford it." And, acting upon the physician's advice, Crandall went down to the Gulf coast of Mississippi and took up his abode at Ocean Springs, a place settled by the Spaniards many years before there was a New Orleans. He rented a cottage built high upon the pine wooded bluff, hired a negro cook and was soon at home with his guns and fishing tackle upon the walls. Some one asked him if he had brought any books with him and he answered, "No, I left them in the black shadow of the university. What I'm looking for is sunshine. And, by the way, yonder it is now, out in that boat."

That, in fact, was not the name of a girl sitting in a boat not far from the end of the pier on which Crandall and a newly-formed acquaintance were standing. It was not the name by which she was known among the neighbors, but a name which a stranger might have applied to her. Her hair, as it streamed in the breeze, was a wayward flame, so golden was its hue; and when she stood erect, which she did at the moment Crandall spoke of her, she was a picture of a grace so true as might never be effaced from the mind.

"Who is she?" he asked of the man who stood beside him; and thus was he enlightened. "She is the granddaughter of an old fellow who lives in that queer-looking house yonder, the one with the round tower. About here it is known, and he himself boasts of the fact, that he is the grandson of a famous French pirate who once infested the coast along here, and whose crimes were condoned by the government on account of services which he rendered Andrew Jackson's army. I don't know what her name is."

"I believe I'll row over and have a talk with her," said Crandall. "You may do as you like, but the old man is dead set against any attentions that strangers pay her."

By this time Crandall was in his boat. The girl did not take notice of his approach—she paid not the slightest heed to him until he spoke, and then, turning to him, she said: "I'm not acquainted with you."

"A fact which I acknowledge with regret," he replied. "Oh, you do," said, giving him a full view of her wondrous eyes. "Yes, and your name is—let me see. Isn't your grandfather a grandson of the LeFevre—or whatever his name was—who robbed on the sea and built a fort on Lake Ponchartraine?"

"You seem to have read history, at any rate."

"Yes, I have skimmed the most important events, and I can dip up a happening all right, but dates run through my skimmer. What are you trying to catch here?"

"Fish," she answered; and he replied: "I might have surmised as much," and then she rejoined: "Oh, as to that, a man doesn't often take the trouble to surmise reasonably when his only object is to gain an opportunity to ask a question."

"By George, Miss Pate, you are as sharp as a young ancestor," and when she had looked at him and laughed, for the remark did not displease her, he added: "It may be small concern to you, but we are neighbors. I live yonder among the pines."

"Oh, you are the crazy man," she said, looking at him closer. He looked back at her in astonishment, and she explained: "That's what some of the folks believe. What else could they think of a man who hangs up a leather bag and hits it nearly all night?" He explained that he was merely taking exercise and she asked him why he didn't cut wood, and he replied that it would give him pleasure to make chips fly for her. She tried to frown at him, but laughed. They had been drifting along together. Now she took up the oars. He asked her what she was going to do, and she replied that she was going home, of course. He could not expect her to remain out there with a stranger. And, laughing, she rowed off from him; and shortly afterward he muttered an impression against himself for not having nerve enough to follow her, and late that night he turned from the punching bag and said to himself: "Come, old fellow, brush that face out of your mind. But it is in my mind? Isn't it deeper? Ah, didn't the heart camera take a snap shot at her?" And, bounding up, he furiously attacked the bag. It was his intention to go out upon the water early the next morning in the hope of seeing her, but the dawn came with a lashing of rain on the roof. But later in the day he went over to the "Pirates." There was a high fence about the house, and the rusty iron gate was fastened with a chain and padlock. He shook the gate and shouted and after a time an old man with a bushy head of fierce-looking hair came out upon the veranda and demanded to know the cause of such a disturbance at his gate. Crandall replied that no disturbance was intended, and then the old man asked him what he wanted. Crandall didn't know exactly what to say—he didn't care to blurt out that he wanted to see the girl, so he remarked: "Why, you see, we are neighbors."

"I'm not acquainted with you," said the old man, and he broke in. "And if that's the case don't you think you ought to have waited for me to call first?" "Well, yes," Crandall admitted, "that would have been more formal; but I am willing to dispense with formality." "But I am not," said the old man, stepping inside and shutting the door; and as Crandall was about to turn away he thought he heard the music of a mischievous laugh. During all that day, and during nearly all the night he worried over the truth that the picture had been taken by his heart instead of his mind. The next morning he was on the pier when the sun arose and his eye swept the flashing water, but he did not see her; and after waiting until noontime he returned to the house to brood over her, to gaze inward at her picture, with hair streaming like a flame. Late in the afternoon he wandered by the wooded shore and suddenly he halted, with his heart beating hard, for there she sat beneath a pine tree, gazing out upon the quiet water. He halted, stood and looked at her, and she did not withdraw her eyes from the sleeping sea, for she had not heard him; but he stepped back, to retreat in the timidity that suddenly had come upon him; a twig snapped beneath his foot and she looked round.

"I beg your pardon," said he; and she replied: "Oh, no, but I beg your pardon for laughing when you were driven away from our gate."

He sat down beside her and she made no objection. And they talked with a freedom that cut an hour short. At last a voice called her and she started up, declaring that she did not know it was so late. He called her name, and she said: "It is a pretty name."

"Good-by," said Crandall, running away from him.

"When may I see you again?" he called after her, and back came the words: "Oh, you mustn't think of that. Perhaps not at all."

He returned to the place the next afternoon and waited until after the sun had set.

"Oh, we are!" the old man broke in. "And if that's the case don't you think you ought to have waited for me to call first?" "Well, yes," Crandall admitted, "that would have been more formal; but I am willing to dispense with formality." "But I am not," said the old man, stepping inside and shutting the door; and as Crandall was about to turn away he thought he heard the music of a mischievous laugh. During all that day, and during nearly all the night he worried over the truth that the picture had been taken by his heart instead of his mind. The next morning he was on the pier when the sun arose and his eye swept the flashing water, but he did not see her; and after waiting until noontime he returned to the house to brood over her, to gaze inward at her picture, with hair streaming like a flame. Late in the afternoon he wandered by the wooded shore and suddenly he halted, with his heart beating hard, for there she sat beneath a pine tree, gazing out upon the quiet water. He halted, stood and looked at her, and she did not withdraw her eyes from the sleeping sea, for she had not heard him; but he stepped back, to retreat in the timidity that suddenly had come upon him; a twig snapped beneath his foot and she looked round.

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She did not come. But the next day he found her reading in the woods. She was self-possessed, but this time she blushed when suddenly he appeared before her. And now how soft were her accents, so different from the tone of raillery that had characterized their first meeting. And thus they met, sometimes every day for a week, and then not at all for several days. She would never agree to an appointment, always leaving their meeting to chance. One day they sat gazing out upon the dreary sea, and he had taken so severe a course in athletics that he had reason to believe that all emotion had been trained out of him, he said. "Violent exercise is sometimes an offset to strong mental—I might say heart emotion. But I find that with me this belief was all a fallacy," she looked at him as if she did not understand his meaning, and, though he knew she did, yet he pretended that he did not. "Have you been trying to feel strong emotion?" she asked, and he replied: "No, not trying to feel it."

"I don't know what you mean," she said, and then he cried: "Oh, yes, you mean, and he put his arms about her; and the hours flew and the sun sunk low and flamed upon the water, "like your hair spread out," he said. And then they heard the old man calling her. He was near at hand, and he saw Crandall. "Here," said he, "I've got a word to say that may be of use to you. From this time on you will see the black flag of pay ancestors flying from the tower on my house. If you come on my land you will be shot, and if you attempt to influence any further the mind of this child I will hunt you and kill you."

"She is to be my wife," said Crandall. "Then she is to be a bride and a widow at the same time," replied the old man. He led the girl away and Crandall went home and walked the floor all night; and when morning came he looked out and there was the black flag of the Ponchartraine pirates floating from the tower on the old man's house. He roamed about in the woods all day, but did not see the girl. And each morning there was the black flag, and there it was at night, a patch of deeper darkness in the dark sky; and one night, when lightning flashed, he saw it streaming, red, like a flame—like her hair. Once he ventured near the house, and a bullet nipped a bit of bark under a tree just above his head. Early one morning he stood waiting for the sun to rise, but, instead, a cloud and a wind arose, almost a hurricane. Suddenly he saw a sailboat near by, struggling hard, and then it was overturned and blown fast away, leaving a man struggling in the water—an old man, and Crandall thought that he recognized the girl's grandfather. He did not hesitate. He sprang into the sea, seized the old fellow and swam to shore with him; and, staggering upon the sand, he looked at Crandall and said: "You fool, why didn't you let me drown?"

Crandall went home and sat down to brood, with the black flag still in sight. It was the last day of the year. Early the next morning before it was light he went out and was standing near his door when a cloud lifted and the sun flashed; and then his heart leaped, for the black flag was gone. And just at that moment the old man, leading the girl by the hand, came round the corner of the house. "I have brought you a New Year's present," he said.

Method.

"Rivers, in all my experience I have never known you to smoke as vile cigars as those you are indulging in now."

"That's all right, Brooks. I am trying to make it easier to swear off New Year's day," Chicago Tribune.

Her Diary.

New brooms sweep clean, as everyone must know. While she at first is careful to express each trifle in detail, how soon 'twill grow "Small by degrees and beautifully less."

A Matter of Necessity.

Willie—Why does a man swear off so many things at New Year's?" Crabsaw—He has to, my boy, for he spent all his money at Christmas.—Judge.

Just the Term for Him.

"Why do you speak of him as a finished artist?" "Because he told me he was utterly discouraged and was going to quit the profession. I that doesn't show that he's finished I don't know what does."—Chicago Post.

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And a person of an enquiring mind may ask the reason why it is simply a matter of fact that such persons are unable to study human nature. They do not spend their thoughts for a moment with acquiring the art of philosophy and kindred branches that will have a tendency to make the pathway to the road of the business clear and devoid of all obstacles.

It is an undeniable fact that persons will come for advice in full knowledge of what they want to know, and yet as soon as they confront a Medium they try their utmost endeavor to dispel from their minds what they know as to hear if it will be rehearsed by a Medium. It is the art used by many unprincipled mediums, but to take hold of the head and gain control of the mind thereby is a matter of impossibility to most of them. And yet this can be done and by consulting Mrs. Martin the seeming mystery becomes a realization.

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